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LETTER DATED 24 NOVEMBER 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ERITREA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to forward to you the attached statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Eritrea issued on 24 November 1998, which is self-explanatory.

I should be grateful if you would kindly circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Haile MENKERIOS
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Ethiopia's crocodile tears on fires it is igniting

The Government of Ethiopia is spreading false claims that "Eritrea has stepped up artillery shelling of its positions on the Zalambesa and Badme front lines in the past few days". Addis Ababa has further tried to misconstrue the facts and associate "the stepped-up shelling" with the peace talks under way.

In the first place, it is the Government of Eritrea that has been consistently calling for a cessation of hostilities as a measure of de-escalation and to create a more conducive climate for the peace talks. This express request was tabled by Eritrea at the Ministerial Meeting in Ouagadougou on 2 August 1998. It did not materialize because Ethiopia refused to countenance any arrangement of a formal ceasefire. Moreover, Eritrea fully embraced the draft resolution at the Twelfth Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries, held at Durban, South Africa, in September, that called on both sides to "agree to a cessation of hostilities". But this clause was omitted from the final resolution owing to "vehement opposition from Ethiopia".

At the Ouagadougou meeting of the Organization of African Unity High-Level Delegation on 7 and 8 November, Eritrea again pressed for an agreement on a cessation of hostilities. But Ethiopia's invariable intransigence precluded any arrangement.

These are the true facts. Eritrea does not have any interest in an escalation of the conflict, and all its efforts in the past five months have indeed been geared towards seeking ways and means of reducing the existing tension. But it does respond to artillery fire and is routinely provoked by Ethiopia, whose Foreign Minister admitted as much last week when he stated that there were "exchanges on all fronts nearly every day".

Eritrea reiterates its call for an immediate cessation of all hostilities, which will bring an end to all artillery exchanges. It reaffirms that it will continue to exercise maximum restraint in the face of continued Ethiopian provocation. Eritrea further maintains that the placement of observers or independent monitors, to which Ethiopia has been objecting in the past, would help in averting these unnecessary exchanges or provide, at the minimum, independent verification of who is responsible for starting artillery exchanges.

The Government of Eritrea would like to stress, moreover, that the damage and danger from sporadic artillery exchanges, grave as it is, pales in significance to that caused by Ethiopia's continued massive, illegal and inhuman deportation of Eritreans from Ethiopia and the continued detention of thousands of Eritreans, including university exchange students, in concentration camps. The number of deportees is now over 36,000 and Ethiopia no longer cares to

fabricate excuses for its expulsions. It is sad and telling that Ethiopia continues its gross violations of human rights with impunity. Although its appeals have, for the most part, fallen on deaf ears, Eritrea once again calls on the international community to publicly condemn and take urgent action to stop the uprooting of an entire community.